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U.S. Starts 'Project Truth' In a Move to Counter

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 3 — The United States International Communication Agency, responding to a Reagan Administration desire to counter Soviet propaganda, has begun a new effort of its own called "Project Truth."

Charles Z. Wick, the agency's director, who is due to discuss the project tomorrow in San Francisco at a meeting of the Northern California World Affairs Council, reportedly told a similar foreign policy group here on Oct. 23 that his agency would be working with the State and Defense Departments as well as the Central Intelligence Agency in gathering "evidence" for the project.

Mr. Wick's comments have raised questions about the agency's independence within the Government and its credibility abroad.

Fast Replies Said to Be Goal

"Project Truth" is designed, according to agency officials, to provide a fast-reply service to posts abroad when rumors or news reports about American activity thought to be untrue begin to circulate.

Under the project, the agency will also be issuing a monthly publication, "Soviet Propaganda Alert." The first issue, distributed to agency posts in embassies abroad, was published Oct. 15.

Since its inception at the end of World War II as the United States Information Agency, the overseas information arm of the Government has periodically faced attempts to subject it to overall policy direction by the White House or State Department. The agency fought off such intrusions with the argument that it needed independence to protect the credibility of its work broad, particularly that of the Voice of America.

Under legislation passed in 1947 and 1953 to protect Americans from the propaganda of their own Government, "Soviet Propaganda Alert" is classified as a "program item" and therefore cannot be made public in the United States.

Excerpts in Congressional Record

However, under a Congressional exemption from the law, excerpts from the first issue of the publication were read

into the Congressional Record on Oct. 23 and 27 by Rep. Robert H. Michel, Republican of Illinois, the House Minority Leader.

The excerpts catalogue characteristics and themes of Soviet propaganda and examples of what the Administration calls Soviet "disinformation," or deliberate falsehoods and forgeries.

The Administration has on several occasions singled out what it considers examples of inaccurate and provocative information circulating abroad that is harmful to the United States.

On Oct. 8, the State Department issued a four-page special report on Soviet "disinformation" activity that included allegations of Moscow's responsibility for reports that the United States was behind the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, that an American diplomat named to a post in India had been an intelligence agent and that the C.I.A. was implicated in the air-crash death of Panama's leader, Gen. Omar Torrijos Herrera, last August.

European Protests Cited

Since the publication of that document, the Administration appears to have added to its list of Soviet activities what it says is Moscow's support for the recent antinuclear demonstrations in several European capitals.

According to a high-ranking State Department official, the Central Intelligence Agency has provided the State Department with fairly detailed evidence that purportedly links money from the Soviet bloc to peace groups in West Germany. The State Department has sought to have the C.I.A. material made public, but repeated requests for this have been rejected by the agency.

Mr. Wick, speaking to the National Council of World Affairs Organizations here on Oct. 23, said, according to a member of the audience, that the United States International Communication Agency had been working with other Government branches to "develop" evidence that demonstrations against the stationing of new American missiles in Europe were Communist-inspired.

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